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ABSTRACT

This booklet provides general information about the accreditation of postsecondary institutions by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. It describes: (1) the mission, programs, and services offered by the CIHE; (2) the evaluation process; (3) general institutional requirements in regard to mission, authorization, governance, faculty, educational program, finances, and public information; (4) criteria for accreditation, including institutional purpose, resource management, educational activities, educational effectiveness, and integrity; and (5) answers to frequently asked questions about the accreditation process. A list of CIHE publications is also included. (MDM)

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ACCREDITATION Of Higher Education Institutions: AN OVERVIEW

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ACCREDITATION

OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS:

AN OVERVIEW

This pamphlet provides brief general information about the accreditation of higher education institutions by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools; identifies and responds to frequently asked questions about accreditation; and lists publications available from the Commission.

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INTRODUCTION

In the United States, accreditation is voluntarily sought by institutions and is conferred by non-governmental bodies. There are two types of educational accreditation: institutional and specialized.

An institutional accrediting body evaluates an entire institution in terms of its mission and accredits the institution as a whole. It reviews more than the educational offerings of the institution; it also assesses such characteristics as governance and administration, financial condition, admissions and student personnel processes, institutional resources, and relationships with outside communities. Institutional accreditation is provided by regional associations of schools and colleges (each named after the region in which it operates—Middle States, New England, North Central, Northwest, Southern, Western); and by several national associations that limit their scope to particular kinds of institutions. While independent of one another, the regional associations cooperate extensively and recognize one another's accreditation.

A specialized accrediting body evaluates particular units, schools, or programs within an institution. Specialized accreditation, also called program accreditation, is often associated with national professional associations, such as those for engineering, medicine, and law, or with specific disciplines, such as business, education, psychology, or social work.

THE NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools is a not-for-profit, voluntary, membership organization of elementary, secondary, and postsecondary institutions, founded in 1895, and committed to the improvement of education through evaluation and accreditation. According to its articles of incorporation:

The purpose of the association shall be the development and maintenance of high standards of excellence for universities, colleges, and schools, the continued improvement of the educational program and effectiveness of instruction on elementary, secondary, and college levels through a scientific and professional approach to the solution of educational problems, the establishment of cooperative relationships between the schools and colleges and universities within the territory of the association, and the maintenance of effective working relationships with other educational organizations and accrediting agencies.

The Association serves colleges and schools in nineteen states—Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming—and Department of Defense Schools and Navajo Nation schools.

The Association is organized into two Commissions:

- The Commission on Schools, with its office in Tempe, Arizona, accredits institutions below the postsecondary degree-granting level. This Commission works extensively through state committees throughout the region.
- The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, with its office in Chicago, Illinois, accredits degree-granting institutions of higher education.

The Board of Directors of the North Central Association consists of the officers of the Association and the members of the boards of its two Commissions.

THE COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The Commission adopted the following *Statement of Mission* on August 6, 1992:

History and Purpose

The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education is part of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The Association was founded in 1895 as a membership organization for educational institutions. It is committed to developing and maintaining high standards of excellence. The Association is one of six regional institutional accrediting associations in the United States. Through its Commissions it accredits, and thereby grants membership to educational institutions in the nineteen-state North Central region. The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education is recognized by the Secretary of Education and the Committee on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (CORPA).

Statement of Mission

The mission of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education is (1) to establish requirements and criteria for the accreditation of institutions of higher education and accredit institutions found to

meet those requirements and criteria; (2) to strengthen educational and institutional quality through its assistance to its affiliated institutions, its evaluation processes and its programs, publications, and research; (3) to advocate and exercise self-regulation in higher education through effective peer review; and (4) to provide to the public accurate information concerning the relationship of affiliated institutions with the Commission.

To fulfill its mission, the Commission:

- monitors and evaluates institutions affiliated with it, to ensure that they continue to meet the Commission's requirements and criteria and strive to improve their institutional strength and the quality of the education they provide;
- prepares and disseminates publications, provides counsel, sponsors research, and conducts meetings directed toward the improvement of higher education;
- evaluates itself to assure that its policies and practices represent the best theory and practice of institutional accreditation, promote the self-regulation of institutions, and respond to the educational needs of society;
- provides a program of non-membership affiliation open to new or developing institutions of higher education that appear capable of achieving accreditation within a specific period of time;
- involves educators from member institutions in all of its review and decision-making processes, and trains and evaluates them to ensure that their work is consistent and of high quality;
- serves the public by providing useful information about the role and purposes of accreditation, and by providing through its publications and other means timely and accurate information concerning affiliated institutions;
- honors the historical purposes of the North Central Association through its work with the Commission on Schools to strengthen the linkages between primary and secondary education and higher education;
- cooperates with other agencies that share the objectives of assuring the integrity and enhancing the quality of higher education.

THE PERSONNEL OF THE COMMISSION

The Commission's work is conducted by several groups:

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- A professional, administrative, and support staff who are responsible for implementing the Commission's programs and policies and conducting all of the Commission's activities.
- A corps of more than 800 Consultant-Evaluators, selected for their experience and expertise from all types of accredited institutions throughout the North Central region, who serve as members of evaluation teams that conduct the site visits.
- A special group of Consultant-Evaluators from member institutions who serve as Accreditation Review Council Members and participate in the review processes of the Commission, the second step in the evaluation process following the team visit.
- Fifteen Commissioners who comprise the decision and policy making body of the Commission. Twelve come from accredited institutions, and three are representatives of the public. Commissioners are responsible for decisions on the accreditation of institutions, for the formulation of Commission policies, and for the oversight of Commission operations. The person elected by the Commission to serve as Association Vice-President/President serves as an ex-officio member of the Commission.

COMMISSION PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The Commission offers an extensive variety of programs and services to all its institutions. Each affiliated institution is assigned to a professional staff liaison. These staff provide assistance to institutions and to evaluation teams both during the self-study and evaluation processes for initial or continued status; monitor institutions continuously through Annual Reports and institutional change processes; and offer other types of counsel.

The Commission's publications and its Annual Meeting are a major part of the effort to assist institutions. To inform all its constituencies, the Commission publishes a variety of materials on self-study, evaluation, and institutional improvement, including the *Handbook of Accreditation*, describing the policies and procedures for the accreditation process, the *Briefing* newsletter, two editions of the *NCA Quarterly* journal, and various other documents and articles (see page 20). The Commission offers an extensive program on self-study, evaluation, and institutional improvement for institutions, Consultant-Evaluators, and others as a part of the Annual Meeting of the North Central Association held in early spring in Chicago.

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FORMS OF AFFILIATION

Institutions of higher education may be affiliated with the Commission, and through it with the North Central Association, in either of two ways: by gaining and maintaining accredited status; or by gaining and maintaining candidacy, which is a pre-accredited status. Both affiliations are voluntary. Currently there are more than 975 institutions affiliated with the Commission.

THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The Commission's process of evaluation for both initial and continued accreditation is formulated to determine whether an institution meets the General Institutional Requirements (GIRs) and the Criteria for Accreditation. There are four steps in the process:

- First, the institution undertakes a self-study aimed at examining how it meets the GIRs and the Criteria. The results of the self-examination are summarized in a Self-Study Report that forms the basis for the Commission's evaluation. The completed Self-Study Report constitutes the institution's formal application for initial or continued accreditation.
- Second, the institution is visited by a team of Consultant-Evaluators appointed by the Commission. This team gathers comprehensive information about the institution and summarizes its findings in a written Team Report. The Report assesses whether the institution satisfies the GIRs and the Criteria, offers advice and suggestions for improvement, and concludes with a formal recommendation for accreditation action. The institution has an opportunity to make a formal written response to the Team Report.
- Third, the Self-Study Report and the Team Report are reviewed by a Readers' Panel and/or by a Review Committee that meets with representatives of the institution and the team. If the review process results in suggested changes in the team recommendation, the institution and the team chair have an opportunity to respond in writing.
- Fourth, all recommendations are considered by the Commission, which takes official action on the institution's accreditation.

The evaluation process for initial and continued candidacy includes the same four parts.

GENERAL INSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS

An institution affiliated with the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools meets the following General Institutional Requirements:

Mission

1. It has a mission statement, formally adopted by the governing board and made public, declaring that it is an institution of higher education.
2. It is a degree-granting institution.

Authorization

3. It has legal authorization to grant its degrees, and it meets all the legal requirements to operate as an institution of higher education wherever it conducts its activities.
4. It has legal documents to confirm its status; not-for-profit, for-profit, or public.

Governance

5. It has a governing board that possesses and exercises necessary legal power to establish and review basic policies that govern the institution.
6. Its governing board includes public members and is sufficiently autonomous from the administration and ownership to assure the integrity of the institution.
7. It has an executive officer designated by the governing board to provide administrative leadership for the institution.
8. Its governing board authorizes the institution's affiliation with the Commission.

Faculty

9. It employs a faculty that has earned from accredited institutions the degrees appropriate to the level of instruction offered by the institution.
10. A sufficient number of the faculty are full-time employees of the institution.
11. Its faculty has a significant role in developing and evaluating all of the institution's educational programs.

Educational Program

12. It confers degrees.
13. It has degree programs in operation, with students enrolled in them.
14. Its degree programs are compatible with the institution's mission and are based on recognized fields of study at the higher education level.
15. Its degrees are appropriately named, following practices common to institutions of higher education in terms of both length and content of the programs.
16. Its undergraduate degree programs include a coherent general education requirement consistent with the institution's mission and designed to ensure breadth of knowledge and to promote intellectual inquiry.
17. It has admission policies and practices that are consistent with the institution's mission and appropriate to its educational programs.
18. It provides its students access to those learning resources and support services for its degree programs.

Finances

19. It has an external financial audit by a certified public accountant or a public audit agency at least every two years.
20. Its financial documents demonstrate the appropriate allocation and use of resources to support its educational programs.
21. Its financial practices, records, and reports demonstrate fiscal viability.

Public Information

22. Its catalog or other official documents includes its mission statement along with accurate descriptions of its educational programs and degree requirements; its learning resources; its admissions policies and practices; its academic and non-academic policies and procedures directly affecting students; its charges and refund policies; and the academic credentials of its faculty and administrators.

23. It accurately discloses its standing with accrediting bodies with which it is affiliated.
24. It makes available upon request information that accurately describes its financial condition.

The Commission provides a fuller explanation of its expectations for each GIR through an accompanying explication, published in the *Handbook of Accreditation*, available from the Commission office.

THE CRITERIA FOR ACCREDITATION

In addition to the **General Institutional Requirements**, an institution seeking accreditation by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education demonstrates that it satisfies five **Criteria for Accreditation**. Because all five of the Commission's **Criteria** are critical to overall institutional effectiveness, meeting all five is required for accreditation.

In analyzing an institution to identify its strengths and weaknesses, it is critical that both institutions and evaluators understand what is judged under which criterion. To assist those involved in making these judgments, the Commission provides a formally-approved list of typical areas of institutional activity or concern that form a "Pattern of Evidence" related directly to the satisfaction of each of the five criteria. These indicators illustrate characteristic varieties of evidence that an institution might present in building its case.

These indicators are not "checklists," nor are they exhaustive; they are broad descriptions of the kind of concerns and issues the Commission considers when making a holistic decision on each criterion. Not every indicator will be critical for every institution; many institutions include additional indicators of their success in fulfilling the criteria.

The five Criteria for Accreditation are:

Criterion 1. The institution has clear and publicly stated purposes consistent with its mission and appropriate to an institution of higher education.

In determining appropriate patterns of evidence for this criterion, the Commission considers evidence such as:

- long- and short-range institutional and educational goals.

- processes, involving its constituencies, through which the institution evaluates its purposes.
- decision-making processes that are appropriate to its stated mission and purposes.
- understanding of the stated purposes by institutional constituencies.
- efforts to keep the public informed of its institutional and educational goals through documents such as the catalog and program brochures.
- support for freedom of inquiry for faculty and students.
- institutional commitment to excellence in both the teaching provided by faculty and the learning expected of students.

Criterion 2. The institution has effectively organized the human, financial, and physical resources necessary to accomplish its purposes.

In determining appropriate patterns of evidence for this criterion, the Commission considers evidence such as:

- governance by a board consisting of informed people who understand their responsibilities, function in accordance with stated board policies, and have the resolve necessary to preserve the institution's integrity.
- effective administration through well-defined and understood organizational structures, policies, and procedures.
- qualified and experienced administrative personnel who oversee institutional activities and exercise appropriate responsibility for them.
- systems of governance that provide dependable information to the institution's constituencies and, as appropriate, involve them in the decision-making processes.
- faculty with educational credentials that testify to appropriate preparation for the courses they teach.
- a sufficient number of students enrolled to meet the institution's stated educational purposes.
- provision of services that afford all admitted students the opportunity to succeed.
- a physical plant that supports effective teaching and learning.

- conscientious efforts to provide students with a safe and healthy environment.
- academic resources and equipment (e.g., libraries, electronic services and products, learning resource centers, laboratories and studios, computers) adequate to support the institution's purposes.
- a pattern of financial expenditures that shows the commitment to provide both the environment and the human resources necessary for effective teaching and learning.
- management of financial resources to maximize the institution's capability to meet its purposes.

Criterion 3. The institution is accomplishing its educational and other purposes.

In determining appropriate patterns of evidence for this criterion, the Commission considers evidence such as:

- educational programs appropriate to an institution of higher education.
 - ✓ courses of study in the academic programs that are clearly defined, coherent, and intellectually rigorous;
 - ✓ programs that include courses and/or activities whose purpose is to stimulate the examination and understanding of personal, social, and civic values;
 - ✓ programs that require of the faculty and students (as appropriate to the level of the educational program) the use of scholarship and/or the participation in research as part of the programs;
 - ✓ programs that require intellectual interaction between student and faculty and encourage it between student and student.
- assessment of appropriate student academic achievement in all its programs, documenting:
 - ✓ proficiency in skills and competencies essential for all college-educated adults;
 - ✓ completion of an identifiable and coherent undergraduate level general education component; and
 - ✓ mastery of the level of knowledge appropriate to the degree granted.

- transcripts that accurately reflect student learning and follow commonly accepted practices.
- effective teaching that characterizes its courses and academic programs.
- ongoing support for professional development for faculty, staff, and administrators.
- student services that effectively support the institution's purposes.
- staff and faculty service that contributes to the institution's effectiveness.
- if appropriate:
 - ✓ evidence of support for the stated commitment to basic and applied research through provision of sufficient human, financial, and physical resources to produce effective research;
 - ✓ evidence of support for the stated commitment to the fine and creative arts through provision of sufficient human, financial, and physical resources to produce creative endeavors and activities;
 - ✓ evidence of effective delivery of educational and other services to its community;
 - ✓ evidence of development and offering of effective courses and programs to meet the needs of its sponsoring organization and other special constituencies.

Criterion 4. The institution can continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness.

In determining appropriate patterns of evidence for this criterion, the Commission considers evidence such as:

- a current resource base—financial, physical, and human—that positions the institution for the future.
- decision-making processes with tested capability of responding effectively to anticipated and unanticipated challenges to the institution.
- structured assessment processes that are continuous, that involve a variety of institutional constituencies, and that provide meaningful and useful information to the planning processes as well as to students, faculty, and administration.
- plans as well as ongoing, effective planning processes necessary to the institution's continuance.

- resources organized and allocated to support its plans for strengthening both the institution and its programs.

Criterion 5. The institution demonstrates integrity in its practices and relationships.

In determining appropriate patterns of evidence for this criterion, the Commission considers evidence such as:

- student, faculty, and staff handbooks that describe various institutional relationships with those constituencies, including appropriate grievance procedures.
- policies and practices for the resolution of internal disputes within the institution's constituency.
- policies and practices consistent with its mission related to equity of treatment, nondiscrimination, affirmative action, and other means of enhancing access to education and the building of a diverse educational community.
- institutional publications, statements, and advertising that describe accurately and fairly the institution, its operations, and its programs.
- relationships with other institutions of higher education conducted ethically and responsibly.
- appropriate support for resources shared with other institutions.
- policies and procedures regarding institutional relationships with and responsibility for intercollegiate athletics, student associations, and subsidiary or related business enterprises.
- oversight processes for monitoring contractual arrangements with government, industry, and other organizations.

While the Criteria are intentionally general, the judgments concerning them are founded on careful and detailed examination of the specifics of the institution. Their generality ensures that accreditation decisions focus on the particulars of each institution's own purposes, rather than on trying to make institutions fit into a preestablished mold. The widely different purposes and scopes of educational institutions demand that the criteria by which an institutional accrediting body makes its judgments be broad enough to encompass, if not encourage, innovation, yet clear enough to assure acceptable quality.

THE CANDIDACY PROGRAM

On August 7, 1992, the Commission approved a new candidacy program. In defining that program, the Commission made explicit the following expectations for all candidate institutions:

An applying institution must demonstrate that it meets the General Institutional Requirements. In addition, it will be measured against the Criteria for Accreditation. An institution seeking candidacy will document through its self-study the degree to which it meets each of the five Criteria, and, through a carefully articulated plan and timetable, will show how it will meet fully each of them within the six year period of candidacy.

To achieve candidacy, an institution will be expected to provide an emerging pattern of evidence for each criterion. In evaluating those patterns of evidence, the commission will judge:

- the basic institutional structure and strength, as documented in the General Institutional Requirements;
- the forthrightness and integrity of the institution's self-study; and
- the potential of the institution to fulfill its plan and achieve accreditation within six years.

Throughout the candidacy period, therefore, Evaluation Teams evaluate and address in their reports whether the institution is progressively demonstrating the patterns of evidence needed to achieve accreditation before the end of the candidacy period. If the institution must modify its plans, or if it fails to fulfill some of its plans, then the Evaluation Team bears the responsibility of determining whether continued candidacy is appropriate.

Attainment of candidacy, however, does not automatically assure eventual accreditation. The Commission does not grant candidacy to an institution unless it has strong evidence that the institution can achieve accreditation within the candidacy period, and it cannot guarantee that an institution will in fact achieve accreditation. The maximum length of candidacy is six years.

OBLIGATIONS OF AFFILIATION

In addition to meeting the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Accreditation or the Can-

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dacy Program, all affiliated institutions voluntarily agree to meet obligations of affiliation, including periodic review, payment of dues and fees, and submitting reports—including an Annual Report—as requested by the Commission.

Every institution must have its accreditation reaffirmed not later than five years after it has been initially granted and not later than ten years following each subsequent reaffirmation. Candidate institutions are evaluated biennially. North Central accreditation is not for a specific period of time but is a continuing relationship between the institution and the Association that is subject to periodic review. Focused visits or reports may be required between comprehensive visits, and Annual Reports and other information from institutions are regularly examined to see whether changes have occurred (or are anticipated) that would necessitate a change in the timing of the next evaluation. In addition, an institution is required to notify the Commission in writing before initiating any change that might alter its relationship with the Commission and to obtain approval of the change from the Commission.

SEEKING INITIAL AFFILIATION

Non-affiliated institutions seeking to affiliate with the Commission should contact the Commission office for information on the process and that process.

The Commission's Preliminary Information Form (PIF) is a document that institutions seeking initial status must complete. It includes an evaluation visit after an initial review. Through the PIF process, convincing evidence that an Evaluation Team might be able to determine whether each GIR is met. The PIF process establishes a relationship between the institution and the Commission.

The PIF includes a summary of estimated costs and a sample timetable. The PIF is available on request from the Commission office.

INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC

The Commission maintains a Record of Status and Scope (RSS) on each affiliated institution. Information is recorded in two sections: the "Statement of Affiliation Status," which captures in summary format the institution's current relationship with the Commission, and the "Statement of Institutional Scope and Activities," which indicates institutional characteristics in areas such as legal structure, number of degrees offered

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at each level enrollment, off-campus offerings, and distinct educational delivery systems. The Commission publishes the RSSs for all institutions annually in its directory issue of the *NCA Quarterly*. Individual RSSs are available on request from the Commission office. In certain situations the Commission may also issue a Public Disclosure Notice to explain a particular relationship with an institution.

COMPLAINTS AGAINST AFFILIATED INSTITUTIONS

One of the ways the Commission fulfills its obligations to the public is to receive complaints against its affiliated institutions and to pursue those that bear upon the institution's meeting of the General Institutional Requirements and/or the Criteria for Accreditation. The Commission usually does not act upon complaints that are being pursued through other avenues such as institutional grievance processes and/or state or federal courts.

Most complaints are best pursued through established means within an institution. The Commission offers the following suggestions for pursuing a complaint through established institutional procedures:

- **Review published policies and procedures.** Every institution has specific policies and procedures for dealing with internal disputes (among faculty, staff, students, and other institutional constituencies). Such policies and procedures are most often published in faculty and student handbooks. Problems with an institution should be pursued through such established policies and procedures to the fullest extent available.
- **Identify appropriate persons or offices.** Educational institutions are usually organized hierarchically. Although titles of the people at the various levels in a particular institution may be different, faculty usually report to department chairs or deans, deans report to vice-presidents for academic affairs, vice presidents report to presidents, and presidents report to boards of trustees. In addition, many institutions are internally organized into different segments, e.g., divisions of academic affairs, student affairs, and business and operations. Failure to receive help in one part of an institution does not necessarily mean that help is not available in another part. In many institutions, an ombudsman or similar person or office may be established for the specific purpose of investigating grievances.

A person who wants to submit a complaint against an institution should send the Commission a signed letter

explaining the complaint and including whatever documentation is necessary to substantiate the complaint. The Commission will advise the complainant of the disposition of the complaint.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the value of institutional accreditation?

For members of the public—and especially prospective students of an institution—the institutional accreditation provided by the North Central Association means that the accredited institution has been found to meet the Commission's requirements and criteria and that there are reasonable grounds for believing that it will continue to meet them. Reaching this conclusion requires that an institution open itself to outside examination conducted by qualified persons using accepted criteria. For the accredited institution, the process of accreditation provides an opportunity for critical self-analysis leading to improvement in quality and for consultation and exchange of information with other institutions. This process also provides public certification of acceptable educational quality and an opportunity and incentive for institutional self-improvement.

Is there a difference between regional accreditation and state licensure?

Yes. While all states have established regulations that must be followed by an institution that operates in that state, these regulations represent a minimum basis for education of students. State authorization does not get confused with institutional or specialized accreditation. An institution may have state authorization to operate, but it may not necessarily be accredited by an institutional or specialized accrediting association. In fact, an institution must have the appropriate authorization by a state to operate before it can seek a status with the Commission.

Does the Commission rank colleges?

No. The purpose of accreditation is to provide public assurance of educational quality and institutional integrity. Rankings may be found in various publications based on specific numerical details (size, tuition, endowment) or on public opinion. However, it is important to remember that colleges and universities differ from one another in significant ways, including mission, programs offered, and students served. Therefore, the important issue for each student is whether the college meets the student's needs. Published rankings

may be one source of information, but they should not be the only source

Can the Commission recommend a college to a student?

No. Selection of a college to attend is a decision that must be made individually. There are so many different types of institutions (small, large, single-program, multiple-program, urban, rural, public, private, etc.) that matching the student's interests and abilities to the characteristics of a college requires detailed information about the student. Information about colleges may be found in various books and directories (available in many libraries), and students are advised to consult with counselors or advisors in secondary schools. The admissions officers of colleges are often able to provide assistance, although they will have the most knowledge of the institution they represent. The public information available from the Commission is limited to that describing the institution's status with the Commission.

Is institutional accreditation the same as program accreditation?

No. Institutional accreditation speaks to the overall quality of the institution without making judgments about specific programs. Institutional accreditation is accreditation of the whole institution, including all programs and sites. The accreditation of individual programs, such as those preparing students to practice a profession, is different from institutional accreditation and is carried out by specialized or "program" accrediting bodies that apply specific standards for curriculum and course content.

The Commission does not maintain lists of programs offered by its accredited institutions. Each specialized accrediting body publishes a list of programs it accredits, and this information is also shown in the annual directory, *Accredited Institutions of Postsecondary Education* (available in many libraries).

For further information about institutional and specialized accreditation (including names and addresses of accrediting bodies) write or call:

Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation
One Dupont Circle, N.W., Suite 305
Washington D. C. 20036

(202) 452-1433

Does accreditation guarantee that credits and degrees can be transferred to another institution?

No. Transferability of credits and degrees is a matter determined by the institution receiving the credits. Transferability depends on several factors: the institution at which credits or degrees were earned; how well the credits offered for transfer mesh with the curriculum offered by the institution to which the student wishes to transfer; and how well the student did in the courses. Accreditation speaks only to the first of these factors and, therefore, cannot by itself guarantee transfer of credits; however, many institutions choose to accept transfer credits only from accredited institutions so that transfer of credits from an unaccredited institution may be excluded. Some institutions have specific agreements with other institutions guaranteeing transfer of credits, but students should be skeptical of any institution that makes unqualified assertions that its credits will transfer to all other institutions. Anyone planning to transfer credits should consult the receiving institution about the transfer at the earliest opportunity—before taking the courses to transfer, if possible.

Who evaluates the Commission?

The Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (COPRA) is a national nongovernmental organization that provides recognition of accrediting bodies. COPRA evaluates each accrediting body against a set of "Provisions for Recognition." The Provisions set forth an extensive list of requirements describing accepted practices in accreditation; COPRA-recognized accrediting bodies must be reevaluated at least every five years.

The U.S. Secretary of Education maintains a list of accrediting bodies determined by the Secretary to be "reliable authorities as to the quality of training offered by educational institutions and programs." The Secretary's list serves as a basis of eligibility for participation in federally-funded programs, including student financial aid. To appear on the list an accrediting body must demonstrate its compliance with a series of criteria established by the Secretary. Reconsideration of status on the list is conducted approximately every four years.

The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association has been recognized by COPRA since 1975 (when COPRA was formed), and by its successor organization, CORPA, and listed by the Secretary of Education (or a predecessor officer) since 1952 (when the first list was published). Through its own committees, the Commission regularly assesses the effectiveness of its policies and procedures.

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FROM THE COMMISSION

- *A Handbook of Accreditation.* This document is addressed to institutions affiliated with the Commission, those seeking affiliation, and the Consultant-Evaluators involved in the various decision making processes. It documents the policies and procedures related to the evaluation and accreditation processes of the Commission. \$15.00
- *NCA Quarterly.* The Spring issue of this publication features articles of particular interest to persons in higher education; the Summer issue provides the list of affiliated elementary and secondary schools; the Fall issue provides the directory of affiliated institutions of higher education; the Winter issue includes articles of particular interest to persons in elementary and secondary schools. Summer and Fall issues: \$10.00. Spring and Winter issues: \$5.00.
- *A Collection of Papers on Self-Study and Institutional Improvement.* This publication includes papers from CIHE Annual Meeting programs that provide advice and suggestions on self-study and address a wide variety of topics related to accreditation and institutional improvement. \$12.00
- *Briefing.* The Commission newsletter is published three times each year. *Briefing* is an invaluable resource for institutions and evaluators who need to be informed of Commission activities. Individual copies: \$3.50. Subscription: \$10.00/year.
- *Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions: An Overview.* This pamphlet provides general information about the accreditation of postsecondary institutions by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. \$1.50.
- *Guidelines on International Education Programs.* The Commission is revising the following working documents: "Guidelines for Good Practice in Overseas International Education Programs for Non-U.S. Nationals" and "A Practical Guide for Organizing and Conducting International Evaluation Visits." Call the Commission office for information on the availability of these documents.

All prices are subject to change.

Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions: An Overview

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For further information about the North Central Association, write or call the appropriate Commission office.

For elementary and secondary schools:

North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Schools
c/o Arizona State University
Tempe, Arizona 85287-3011
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Fax: (602) 965-9423

For institutions of higher education:

North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400
Chicago, Illinois 60602-2504
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